

MEDES, SCYTHIANS AND PERSIANS: THE RISE OF DARIUS IN A NORTH-SOUTH PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

In the middle of the sixth century B.C., the Persian Achaemenid empire was founded by Cyrus the Great upon the foundations of the Median realm of Astyages and his father Cyaxares. Barely thirty years later, in 522-521 B.C., the Persian empire passed through a period of great turmoil that almost proved fatal. The events of those two years are described in the famous and near-contemporary Behistun text that was engraved in three different languages (Elamite; Akkadian; Old Persian) on a rocky surface in West Irān, about 125 kilometres southwest of the old Median capital of Ecbatana, modern Hamadān¹. The inscription was made on the orders of Darius (r. 522-486 B.C.), who at the end of those momentous two years had emerged as the new king of the revived Persian empire. It is this double role of protagonist and of ‘chronicler’ of contemporary events, that has raised some eye-brows as to the reliability of Darius’ report. There is no need to go into all of the details, and a short summary will suffice. The summary is taken from the Behistun text and the pertinent passage in the *Historiae* of Herodotus (III 61ff.), which in the main follows Darius’ interpretation of events².

¹ For the Old Persian version of the text, plus translation, see Kent 1953. A recent, and annotated translation is by Borger and Hinz 1984. The text was again published by Schmitt 1991. The Elamite version was published, with translation, by Weissbach 1911; Hinz 1974 (translation only); and Grillot-Susini, Herrenschmidt and Malbran-Labat 1993. An edition and translation of the Akkadian version was published by von Voigtlander 1978. See also Malbran-Labat 1994. For the partly preserved Aramaic version, not represented at Behistun, see Greenfield and Porten 1982.

² Modern discussions of the events surrounding Darius’ rise to power are too numerous to be listed in full. The most recent studies, with bibliography, are Gschnitzer 1977;

In late 523, or early 522 B.C., Cambyses, the Persian Achaemenid king and son of Cyrus the Great, was returning to his homeland Persis after a prolonged stay in Egypt. While on his way home, or even before that, news reached the imperial army that a revolt had broken out on the Iranian Plateau, in the Achaemenid stronghold of Persis. The uprising was led by a man called Gaumāta, who claimed to be Cambyses' brother Bardiya (Herodotus calls him Smerdis). He was however, according to Darius, not Cambyses' brother, but a *magus*, belonging to the class of Iranian priests that Herodotus elsewhere describes as a subdivision of the Medes (*Hist.* I 101). According to Darius and Herodotus, the real Bardiya had been killed months, if not years before by Cambyses (DB I 26-33)³. According to the Behistun text, Gaumāta's rebellion started on March 11, 522 B.C.⁴, at the Persian site of Paishiyāuvādā, near a mountain called Arakadrish⁵. On July 1, Bardiya/Gaumāta was officially proclaimed king. Soon afterwards⁶ Cambyses died, by accident or natural causes, before he could reach Persis (cf. Walser 1983). The new King's rule however, was only of short duration, and on September 29 of the same year he was murdered by Darius and six other Persian conspirators of high rank at the site of Sikayauvatish, in the district of Nisāya, Media⁷. According to Darius, he was the first to dare speak out against the usurper, denouncing him as an impostor. Herodotus accordingly tells us that no one in the Empire realized the true nature of the King until Darius and his conspirators came to the fore.

Bickerman and Tadmor 1978; Wiesehöfer 1978; Frye 1984:96-103; Vogelsang 1986; Balcer 1987; Dandamaev 1989:83-135; Briant 1992; Lang 1992; Vogelsang 1992:119-132; Koch 1993:49-60; Wiesehöfer 1993:33-43; Zawadzki 1994; Shahbazi 1995; Briant 1996:109ff.

³ According to Herodotus, Smerdis served with Cambyses' army in Egypt, but was subsequently sent back to Persis (*Hist.* III 61-79) and then killed by Cambyses' servant, Prexaspes.

⁴ The last document from Mesopotamia dated to Cambyses, as far as is known to date, is from April 18 (Strassmaier 1890, No. 409). From the same month (the oldest text is dated to April 14: Zawadzki 1994:131; 138) come the first documents dated to the reign of Barziya (Bardiya).

⁵ For the location of Paishiyāuvādā, see Koch 1993:49-51. See also Wiesehöfer 1978: 51-54. In the Elamite version of the Behistun text mention is made of "Nashi[rma], in the mountainous land of Harakkatarrish." Koch suggests, on the basis of information gleaned from the Persepolis Tablets, that the site was located to the east of Persis proper, perhaps at the modern site of Sirgān/Saidābād.

⁶ The text seems to indicate that Cambyses died after July 1. The last Mesopotamian documents which refer to Cambyses date to April (see footnote 4). There is therefore some reason to suggest that Cambyses died before July 1. If he did, Bardiya was legitimately crowned King after the death of his brother (?) who left no children.

After the death of King Bardiya (or his impostor Gaumāta), Darius became King. Almost immediately after Darius' accession to the throne, so continues the Behistun text, revolts broke out in many parts of the Empire. It subsequently took Darius more than a year to quell all the insurrections and become the undisputed king of the Persian realm (see Table 1)⁸.

Table 1. Chronological account of dated events reported in DB paragraphs 10-51⁹

March 11, 522 B.C.	Revolt of Bardiya/Gaumāta
July 1, 522 B.C.	Bardiya/Gaumāta appointed King of Persia
September 29, 522 B.C.	Bardiya/Gaumāta slain
December 10, 522 B.C.	Frāda slain in Margiana
December 13, 522 B.C.	First battle against Nidintu-Bel
December 18, 522 B.C.	Second battle against Nidintu-Bel
December 29, 522 B.C.	First battle in Arachosia at Kāpishākānīsh
December 31, 522 B.C.	First battle of Vaumisa in Armenia
January 12, 521 B.C.	First battle against Fravartish in Media
February 21, 521 B.C.	Second battle in Arachosia (Sattagydia)
March 8, 521 B.C.	First battle in Parthia
May 8, 521 B.C.	Darius defeats Fravartish in Media
May 20, 521 B.C.	First battle of Dādarshish in Armenia
May 24, 521 B.C.	First battle against Vahyazdāta in Persia
May 30, 521 B.C.	Second battle of Dādarshish in Armenia
June 11, 521 B.C.	Second battle of Vaumisa in Armenia
June 20, 521 B.C.	Third battle of Dādarshish in Armenia
July 11, 521 B.C.	Second battle in Parthia
July 15, 521 B.C.	Second battle against Vahyazdāta in Persia
October 12, 521 B.C. ¹⁰	Defeat of Ciçantakhma in Asagartia
November 27, 521 B.C.	Defeat of Arkha, the second 'rebel' in Mesopotamia

Such is the basic account presented in the Behistun text and in the *Histories* of Herodotus. Recent discussions have brought forward some serious doubts as to whether Bardiya/Gaumāta really was an impostor, or whether

⁷ This site is often identified, although without any proof, with Behistun. The Behistun text clearly says that the site was located in Media; a district called Nisāya is also widely attested in various sources as forming part of Media. It is therefore hardly likely that the place was identical with a site near Persian Pasargadae, as suggested by Koch (1993:51-52).

⁸ For the famous 'one year' of Darius, see Vogelsang 1986:127-131, with extensive bibliography.

⁹ For the dates, compare Borger 1982, and Borger and Hinz 1984. See also Vogelsang 1986:127-131.

¹⁰ This date is only reported in the Akkadian version of the DB text. For its reading, see von Voigtlander 1978. I do not follow the speculation by Borger (1982:26ff.). For support of von Voigtlander's reading, see Vogelsang 1986:125.

he was what he claimed to be, namely Cambyses' brother and the son of Cyrus the Great. I do not intend to start this discussion all over again. I hold the opinion, for various reasons that I do not want to list here, that Bardiya/Gaumāta was Cambyses' brother who was killed by Darius and his fellow-conspirators¹¹.

In this article I will concentrate on one specific question which hitherto has remained obscure, but which to me seems essential to a proper understanding of the real course of events and Darius' role and position therein. It is a point briefly referred to by Briant (1996:1332). It deals with the problem whether the many revolts that broke out all over the Empire during those momentous two years were plotted after Darius' victory over Bardiya, as expressly stated in the Behistun text¹², or whether Darius' accession to the throne should be seen as one, and not necessarily the first, in a long series of revolts and attempts at breaking away from central control that started soon after Bardiya became King. On the basis of this discussion I want to put the events of 522-521 B.C. into a wider historical context which emphasizes the North-South opposition on the Iranian Plateau during much of the first millennium B.C.

2. *The revolts that followed*

In the past, most scholars writing on the subject have assumed that the six and a half months of Bardiya's rule, following his coup against Cambyses, constituted a period of relative peace and calm¹³. According to the Behistun text, the many uprisings that Darius had to quell in 522-521 B.C. broke out after King Bardiya's death¹⁴. First of all, as related by Darius in his Behistun text (DB, paragraph 16), there were, after his victory over Bardiya, uprisings in Elam and Mesopotamia. The insurrection in Elam, so Darius informs us, was easily put down by sending a messenger who arrested the rebel leader and took him to Darius. The revolt in Mesopotamia however, had to be quashed by Darius himself. While he was in Mesopotamia (from

¹¹ A brief discussion of the problem is by Boyce (1982:78-89), and, most recently, Shahbazi (1995) and Briant (1996:109ff.).

¹² And supported by Herodotus (*Hist.* III 67).

¹³ Compare Gschnitzer 1977:6; Wiesehöfer 1978:118, 120; Boyce 1982:78, 88; Dandamaev 1989:93.

¹⁴ Balcer (1987) even assumes that most of the revolts broke out after Darius had quelled the first Babylonian uprising, in December 522 B.C.

mid-October 522 B.C. at the earliest), according to Darius, revolts broke out in other parts of the Empire, namely in Persis, Elam (a second revolt), Media, Assyria, Egypt, Parthia, Margiana, Sattagydia, and Scythia (DB, paragraph 21). As I will try to show below, it seems highly unlikely that all of these revolts, including the first Elamite and the Mesopotamian insurrections, were organized and started in the weeks or months following Darius' successful coup against Bardiya. I will try to show instead that some of the uprisings were planned, and in fact started before the end of September. In other words, these revolts were initially directed against King Bardiya, and not against Darius.

First of all there is the uprising in Elam, led by Açina, son of Upadarma (DB, paragraphs 16-17). Darius tells us that, when he heard of Açina's revolt, he sent a messenger to Elam, after which Açina was taken captive and brought to Darius who had him executed. According to Darius the arrest of Açina took place prior to Darius' departure for Babylonia, that is to say, before mid-November at the latest (Darius' first battle in Mesopotamia against Nidintu-Bel was fought on December 13, 522 B.C.), but probably much earlier. The time schedule (stretching from September 29 to mid-November at the latest) is extremely tight. It leaves only some six weeks maximum for an Elamite rebellion to erupt and for Darius to quash it. There is, therefore, some reason to suggest that the first Elamite uprising, led by Açina, was planned, if not started, at a time when Bardiya was still alive. In other words, the Elamites under Açina rose against Bardiya, and not against Darius¹⁵.

Not much is known about the rebel leader, Açina. His name and that of his father are of Iranian (Persian?), rather than Elamite derivation (Mayrhofer 1979:II/11; 26-27), although in the Elamite version of the text he is said to have been an Elamite¹⁶. In the light of the close relationship between the Elamites and the Persians, and the importance of the Elamite city of Susa as one of the Achaemenid capitals, it could consequently be

¹⁵ Balcer (1987:120) also suggests that the Elamite uprising had deeper roots than Darius' assassination of Smerdis. However, in line with his hypothesis that a large part of the Persian (and Median, Babylonian and Elamite) nobility had turned against Cambyses following the Nubian disaster, he holds the opinion that the Elamites soon took sides with Bardiya, but after his death they openly rebelled against the King (Darius).

¹⁶ See however footnotes 23 and 48 for the significance of these ethnic (?) names. The second uprising in Elam was definitely led by a Persian, called Martiya, son of Shinshakrish.

suggested, although the evidence is thin, that the uprising was supported by Elamites and many of the Persians residing in Elam.

Secondly there is the revolt in Babylonia (DB, paragraphs 16; 18-20). According to the Behistun text, a man called Nidintu-Bel revolted after the death of Bardiya and claimed to be Nebuchadnezzar (III). The last known document from Mesopotamia which mentions King Bardiya derives from Babylon and is dated to September 20¹⁷. The 'rebel' Nebuchadnezzar III (Nidintu-Bel) is mentioned for the first time, as known to date, on a tablet from Sippar, dated to October 3, 522 B.C., barely four days after Bardiya's death in Media. Another tablet with the name of Nidintu-Bel dates to October 6 and was found in Babylon¹⁸. Taking into account the distance involved, namely some five hundred kilometres between Babylon and the Median capital of Ecbatana (Hamadān), across the Zagros mountains, it seems unlikely that Nidintu-Bel/Nebuchadnezzar III could have instigated a revolt and have his name listed on official documents at Sippar (some sixty kilometres north of Babylon) within four days of the King's death in distant Media. That is simply impossible. The above information thus casts doubt, to say the least, on the assumption that all was well in Mesopotamia in the days of Bardiya¹⁹. It seems more likely that already in the weeks preceding the death of Bardiya, the King's position, or that of his representative in Babylon, was tottering. In fact, this is exactly also what Herodotus tells us about the Babylonian revolt against the Persians (*Hist.* III 150), when he says that the Babylonians prepared their insurrection all through the reign of the Magos and the chaotic events surrounding the conspiracy against him²⁰.

Thirdly there is the revolt of the people in Margiana under Frāda. According to the Behistun text this uprising started while Darius was in Babylonia (sometime after mid-October 522 B.C., at the earliest). The text

¹⁷ Document 9 in Strassmeier 1889a.

¹⁸ Document 1 and 3 in Strassmeier 1889b. See also Parker and Dubberstein 1956:15, and Dandamaev 1984:15f.

¹⁹ The same problem was recently noted by Zawadzki 1994:131. F.W. König (1938: 38) suggested that Nidintu-Bel started his revolt in August 522 B.C. See also Olmstead 1948:112.

²⁰ However, in this instance Herodotus' words should be used with the greatest of care, since it is clear from the rest of Herodotus' report on the Babylonian revolt that at least some of his information was incorrect, for instance in his statement that the ensuing siege of Babylon lasted for one year and seven months.

(DB, paragraph 38) informs us that the Margians were defeated and massacred on December 10, 522 B.C., by the 'loyal' satrap in Bactra and his army (see below)²¹. The Akkadian and Aramaic versions of the Behistun text indicate that more than 55,000 Margians were killed. Again, it seems highly unlikely that the Margians rebelled against Darius and were subsequently defeated, all within a period of less than two and a half months after the death of King Bardiya in far-away Media (over a distance of more than a thousand kilometres, as the crow flies). The more so when it is realized, or so Darius seems to tell us (see below), that the revolt was crushed by an army led by a satrap who, so it would appear, had his residence at the town/fortress of Bactra (in or near modern Balkh in northern Afghānistān), which lies far to the east of Margiana and only to be reached from Margiana via either of two, equally long and circuitous desert routes over a distance of some six hundred kilometres²². Consequently it is far more likely that the Margians (or their leaders) started, or at least plotted their revolt before they heard about the death of Bardiya and the rise to power of Darius (information which anyhow they could only have received in the second week of October, at the earliest).

An additional point of interest is the dress of the Margian rebel leader, Frāda, as depicted in the Behistun monument. Instead of the Median/Scythic dress that all the other Margians were probably wearing (tunic, trousers; see Vogelsang 1992:135-165), Frāda is depicted in what almost certainly was in the main the Persian/Elamite garb (Luschey 1968: 76). Was Frāda a Persian, by birth or not, who led a local revolt against Bardiya in one of the subject provinces²³?

In the fourth place there is the revolt of the Persians under Vahyazdāta. This rebellion is, again, said to have started while Darius was in Mesopotamia,

²¹ For the date of this massacre, which I put in the year 522 and not in 521 B.C. as suggested by many others, see Vogelsang 1986:121-131.

²² Bactrian involvement in Margian affairs is also stressed in the Behistun text, which in the summary at the end of the section on the Margian rebellion (DB III 38-39) tells us, in the Old Persian version: "This is what was done by me in Bāxtrish". The Akkadian version also adds Margiana to Bactria ("This is what was done by me in Bactria and Margiana").

²³ Frāda is called a Margian in the Behistun text. However, there are serious doubts as to whether the adjectives "Margian", or "Persian", denote ethnic origin, or should be explained otherwise (see Briant 1984:91). Remember that Ačina was called an Elamite, but his name suggests an Iranian (Persian?) origin. See also the name of Dādarshish, below.

thus in the period after mid-October, at the earliest²⁴. However, according to the same source, at the end of December of the same year there was a military force sent by Vahyazdāta at or near the fortress of Kāpishakānīsh, not far to the north of the modern Afghan capital of Kābul, and some 2,000 kilometres from the heartland of Persis (DB, paragraph 42)²⁵. If Vahyazdāta really started his revolt in Persis while Darius was in Babylonia, as stated in the Behistun text, the speed with which Vahyazdāta spread his influence to the east would be surprising. Also the decision itself to despatch a force to the east is difficult to reconcile with the threat posed upon Vahyazdāta by Darius and rival ‘rebels’ like Fravartish in the north-west (Babylonia and Media respectively). Again, there is the suspicion that Vahyazdāta, if not openly, at least went far in plotting a revolt against the King before Darius came to the fore. In other words, the Persians under Vahyazdāta, like the Babylonians under Nidintu-Bel and the Margians under Frāda, and possibly the Elamites (and Persians) under Ačina, seem to have rebelled against Bardiya, and not against Darius.

3. *Vahyazdāta*

There is another point which suggests an unstable political situation in the Empire at least by the end of Bardiya’s reign. Vahyazdāta claimed to be the real Bardiya, the son of Cyrus (DB, paragraphs 40-48). Leaving aside the unlikely possibility that he really was Cyrus’ son, it may safely be assumed that he adopted Bardiya’s name in order to support his imperial claims. In other words, at that time it must have been widely accepted, at least in the area where Vahyazdāta started his rebellion, that King Bardiya/Gaumāta was (or had been) an impersonator. This means that some time before the start of Vahyazdāta’s rebellion rumours must have circulated saying that the King was not the man he proclaimed to be. In view of the military activities of Vahyazdāta (see above), it seems highly likely that these rumours were spread while King Bardiya was still alive. In other words, the account by Darius and Herodotus about the replacement of Cyrus’ son by an impostor is reflected in the name adopted by the Persian

²⁴ According to the Behistun text, Vahyazdāta resided in Tāravā in Yautiyā. This place has been tentatively identified with Tārom in the south of modern Kirmān province (Herzfeld 1968:299). See also Koch 1993:55-56.

²⁵ For the location of Kāpishakānīsh, see Vogelsang 1992:127, with references.

rebel, Vahyazdāta. This means that the story of impersonation and usurpation is not exclusively linked to Darius' rise to power in Media, but was also told in relation to Vahyazdāta's claim for kingship in Persis.

It is thus clear that the situation in Persis during Bardiya's reign was far from calm and peaceful; to the contrary, rumours against the King must have spread weeks, if not months before his death at the end of September. If it is added that the group of conspirators who eventually killed King Bardiya in his Median residence, consisted of Persians, the overall conclusion is reached that by at least early September 522 B.C., but probably earlier, there was a strong rumour among the (leading) Persians, in Persis and beyond, that King Bardiya was not Cyrus' son.

4. The last days of Bardiya

The political situation in the Achaemenid empire in the weeks, or even months preceding the murder of Bardiya at the end of September 522 B.C. was thus marked by a growing opposition between at least some of the (leading) Persians on the one hand, and the King on the other. Tension was growing in Persis, eventually resulting in the revolt by Vahyazdāta, who quickly spread his influence eastward across the Iranian Plateau to the Kandahār and Kābul plains in modern Afghānistān. It is not unlikely that at that time Bardiya was forced to leave Persis and seek refuge some five hundred kilometres further northwest, in Media. Troubles were also brewing in Mesopotamia, conquered by the Persian army under Cyrus in 539 B.C., more than ten years after the Persian victory over the Medes. There are also indications of an uprising in Persian-dominated Elam, halfway between Persis and Babylonia, led by a man possibly of Iranian, Persian descent. Finally there is evidence for a revolt in the oasis settlements of Margiana, led by a man called Frāda, who in the Behistun relief is depicted in a costume which is Persian/Elamite in design.

At the same time we know from the Behistun text that after Darius left Media for Mesopotamia, in the first weeks of October 522 B.C. at the earliest, a wide-spread revolt against him broke out in Media and surrounding lands, all of which had formerly belonged to the Median empire before it was defeated by Cyrus around 550 B.C. (paragraphs 24-37). The main uprising, that by Fravartish in Media, was directed against Darius, and not against Bardiya, otherwise Darius would never have left Media for Babylonia. Fravartish claimed to be Khshathrita, a descendant of Cyaxares, the

former Median king and the man who led his troops in the final assault on the Assyrians in the late seventh century B.C. The Hyrcanian and Parthian ‘rebels’, from districts northeast of Media, came over to the side of Fravartish, so the Behistun text informs us²⁶. And Ciçantakhma, the Asagartan leader from lands east of Media, claimed to be another descendant of Cyaxares²⁷. In addition, the battles which Darius’ generals had to fight in *Armina* are classed in the Behistun text as forming part of the ‘Median’ theatre of war. The ‘Medic’ character of this vast, and undoubtedly most dangerous uprising against Darius is thus evident²⁸.

5. *Gaumāta/Smerdis*

Rumours among the Persians that King Bardiya was not Cyrus’ son, but a usurper of Magian (Median) stock; the murder of Bardiya by Persian noblemen; the place where the murder took place, namely in Media, and the revolt by the Median world against Darius after he had killed his King, all these points taken together would indicate a Persian-Median conflict underlying the events that took place in 522/521 B.C. This hypothesis was in fact presented by a number of scholars who considered Darius to be the true defender of the Persian character of Cyrus’ legacy, while Bardiya/Gaumāta was the Median usurper who wanted to restore the Median empire, or at least strengthen the Median cause (e.g. Nyberg 1938:375, 395; Gray 1969:174). Such is indeed Herodotus’ interpretation of events (*Hist.* III 65, 127 [I 130]). However, these ideas do not tally with other details, such as for instance the Persian support which King Bardiya apparently received at the beginning of his ‘usurpation’, and the surprising fact that in 522-521 B.C. Darius never seems to have ventured into Persis, but left it to his “Persian” general with a “Persian and Median army” to deal with the Persians under Vahyazdāta (DB, paragraph 41). And what to say of the obviously Persian costume which Bardiya/Gaumāta is wearing in the relief of the Behistun monument? Yet, by September 522 B.C.,

²⁶ The Babylonian version of the Behistun texts refers to the Margians, instead of to the Hyrcanians.

²⁷ For the location of the Asagartans, see Vogelsang 1992:124.

²⁸ Darius’ campaign in his Third Year (DB V, paragraphs 74-75) against the so-called *Sakā Tigraxaudā*, or ‘Pointed-Cap Scythians’, should be seen in the same light. These Scythians from southeast of the Caspian Sea held strong links with the Medes (cf. Vogelsang 1992:203).

at the latest, many Persians throughout the Empire must have been convinced that their King was not the true son of their former leader, Cyrus the Great. Instead they accused him of being an impostor, an outsider, a Median *magus*, someone who had taken the place of the true Bardiya, son of Cyrus.

6. *The army comes home*

In previous studies on the subject one particular event seems to have remained unnoticed. Yet it must have been of great importance at the time. I refer to the return to Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau of the Achaemenid army that had accompanied Cambyses to Egypt. In the early months of 522 B.C. the officers and ranks of Cambyses' army returned to Irān, more than three years after leaving their homeland. En route, or while still in Egypt, they were informed that a revolt had broken out which was led by the King's brother, Bardiya. The prince had remained behind in Irān while the Persian Achaemenid army led by Cambyses had ventured westward, far beyond the boundaries of the defunct Median empire, to add the last remaining independent state of any consequence to the Persian empire²⁹. If Bardiya was to succeed in his uprising, not only Cambyses, but also his generals and other immediate followers would surely lose much of their former influence at court. The Persian army thus probably rallied squarely behind its King and prepared to march against the rebel brother³⁰. They did not side with the rebel king. The untimely death however, of Cambyses somewhere between Egypt and Persis left the Persian generals without an obvious leader. Information provided by Herodotus (*Hist.* III 139) would indicate that Darius, the future King, was among this group of leading Persians suddenly stranded somewhere in the Syrian desert³¹. Thus, by the summer of 522 B.C. a large group of upper class Persians and others returned home after a long campaign abroad. They returned without

²⁹ Herodotus (*Hist.* III 31) tells us that Bardiya (Smerdis) at first accompanied his brother Cambyses to Egypt, but was later sent back.

³⁰ In this, my interpretation of events clearly differs from that presented by Balcer (1987). Balcer regards Cambyses' abortive attempt to conquer Nubia as the starting point of growing resentment among Persian nobles against Cambyses.

³¹ For Darius' position, it is important to realize that his father, Vishtāspa, was obviously an important man. Herodotus tells that he was satrap of Persia (*Hist.* I 210-211; III 70); in the Behistun text he seems to be described as a commander in the Northeast.

their King, and found their King's enemy on the throne. At that time morale among all of the Persian forces in the west of the Empire, and in particular in Mesopotamia, must have been low, and many Persians, apprehensive of the future, must have longed to return to their family and homeland, full of resentment against their new King.

Whatever Bardiya's initial support in Persis, the return of the army must have changed the political climate. However, with Cambyses dead, the Persian veterans were in the awkward position that there was no direct descendant of Cyrus to lead them against Bardiya. The King was the only remaining son of Cyrus the Great; by right he was the new king of the Persians, and as such he was the new King. Against this background we may start to understand the rumours that arose, or were further strengthened, as to the true nature of Bardiya. Disclaiming his origin and accusing him of being an impostor, meant that the road was open for his elimination and replacement by another leading Persian, preferably of Achaemenid descent.

7. *Gobryas, satrap of Mesopotamia*

Unrest in Mesopotamia prior to the death of Bardiya is also indicated by possible references to the Persian satrap of that province. He may have been identical, as suggested by Balcer (1993:74-77), with one of the conspirators against Bardiya who, as listed by Darius and Herodotus, was called Gobryas (OP: *Gaubaruva*-), the son of Mardonius (OP: *Marduniya*-). Herodotus tells us that he belonged to the family of the Patischorians (OP *Pātishuvari*-). His daughter was married to Darius. According to Herodotus (*Hist.* VII 3), Darius had three sons with her, all born before he came to the throne. This would mean that the marriage was concluded around 525 B.C. or earlier, and that by that time Gobryas was already a middle-aged man. His name is identical with that of the governor of Babylonia from 535 B.C. onwards, until at least 525 B.C., but probably until 521 B.C. (San Nicolò 1937:53ff.; Dandamaev 1989:65; Stolper 1989:289, 292; Balcer, see above), when he was replaced by Ushtānu. The possible presence in Media of the Babylonian satrap at the end of September 522 B.C. can easily be linked to the uprising led by Nidintu-Bel, which as we discussed earlier must have started before Bardiya's death. In that case the uprising of Nidintu-Bel must have been facilitated, if not instigated, by the growing unrest among the Persian garrison troops in Mesopotamia, and the Persian troops arriving in Mesopotamia on their return from Egypt,

who regarded the King as an impostor and a usurper. These feelings of unrest, plus the insurrection of Nidintu-Bel, may well have driven many Persians back to the Iranian Plateau, and especially to Elam and Persis. A comparable development was recently suggested by S. Zawadzki (1994: 131). The Polish scholar, although still dating the Babylonian revolt to the time after Bardiya's death, attributes the success of Nidintu-Bel's uprising to the absence in Mesopotamia of Persian troops, who had been recalled to Media to prop up Bardiya's position.

Such a course of events would explain a passage in the Behistun text (DB III, paragraph 40), which has never satisfactorily been explained. In the Old Persian version it says, in connection with Vahyazdāta's uprising in Persis (Kent 1953:127): "Thereupon the Persian army which (was) in the (Babylonian?) palace, (having come) from Anshan previously — it became rebellious from me, went over to that Vahyazdāta". The Elamite version is heavily damaged, but the Akkadian version can be read in two manners (von Voigtlander 1978:59): "all the Persian troops who had previously come to me to the palace of Babylon from Anshan revolted from me and went over to Vahyazdāta", or (Frye 1984:100): "the Persian troops as many as had been collected in the house of Babylon from Anshan, revolted from me and went over to Vahyazdāta". The interpretation normally given, namely that Darius refers to troops that had come to him in Babylon, and subsequently defected and returned to Persis (Frye 1984:100), can thus be rejected. Instead the Old Persian and Akkadian versions would refer to Persian troops from Anshan (Elam/Persia), that left Babylonia, passed through Elam and took the side of Vahyazdāta in Persis. This is likely to have occurred before Darius came to Mesopotamia (in November 522 at the latest); this mass-defection thus coincided with the presence in Media, as I suggest, of the Mesopotamian satrap (Gobryas) and may have constituted an important factor in the rise to power of Nidintu-Bel, the revolt of the Elamites, and Vahyazdāta's revolt in Persis.

Whatever the exact course of events in Babylonia in 522 B.C., we can be sure that Persian rule had collapsed by the end of September. Persian troops and Persian leaders, including their satrap Gobryas, had fled back to the Iranian Plateau. Their feelings towards their King, Bardiya, cannot have been very positive. At the same time communication between the Iranian Plateau on the one hand, and the newly conquered province of Egypt on the other hand, was interrupted, and the satrap appointed in Egypt, Aryandes, was left on his own. Darius tells us that the Egyptians

revolted (DB, paragraph 21); it seems far more likely, also because he does not refer to subsequent events in Egypt in his Behistun text, that the Egyptian satrap was reluctant in accepting orders from that young upstart in Media or Mesopotamia, who had killed the legitimate King and who was beset from all sides by uprisings against his position.

8. *The Persian and Median conquests*

There is another point that should be discussed. The Persian Achaemenid empire was built on the foundations of the Median empire. Starting in the second half of the seventh century B.C., the Medes had carved out a large realm in lands that shortly before had been engulfed by the, equally Iranian, Scythians and Cimmerians from the steppes of Central Asia³². In 614 B.C. the Medes conquered the Assyrian capital of Assur, and two years later they occupied Nineveh³³. The victory over the Assyrians was achieved in cooperation with the Babylonians, and the latter included Assyria in their (Neo-) Babylonian empire, leaving the (Iranian-dominated) highlands east and north of the Fertile Crescent to the Medes. By 585 B.C. the Medes had extended their Empire to the banks of the Qizil Irmağ in modern Turkey (the Classical Halys), thus creating a common border with the Lydians; at the same time the Median empire stretched southeast towards the Persian Gulf, thereby including the province of Persis, and to the east it incorporated a number of districts north and northeast of the Dasht-i Kavir (Vogelsang 1992:176-177). I mention this point because it is clear that by the time of Cyrus, after the fall of the last Median king, the extent of the former Median empire was still recognized. Even much later, in the provincial list of the Behistun text, engraved around 519 B.C., the name of *Māda* appears in the tenth place, after a list of provinces in the west of the Achaemenid empire, all conquered by the Persians after their victory over the Medes and located beyond the borders of the old Median realm (Elam,

³² The Scythians and Cimmerians of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. indicate two names for the same group of people, namely the horse-riding newcomers from Central Asia that moved westward via northern Irān towards Azerbāijān and Transcaucasia (the Sakastana of Strabo II 1.14; XI 7.2, 8.4, 14.4), from where they subsequently moved west and south, towards Anatolia and West Irān respectively (see Vogelsang 1992). Compare, most recently, Bokovenko 1996, and Salvini 1995:85-87; 107.

³³ For a recent discussion of the sources that refer to these momentous events, see Zawadzki 1988.

Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the 'Sea Lands', Lydia, Ionia). The name precedes however, a number of lands in the West that formerly belonged to the Median empire (Armenia and Cappadocia), plus a series of lands in the northeast of the Empire. In other words, the list in the Behistun text, which in various respects is quite different from other, and chronologically later Achaemenid provincial lists, indicates the extent of the former Median empire. However, the list also shows Persian awareness, and possibly pride, of the fact that they had conquered a number of provinces (Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt, Lydia) that had formerly remained outside the Median empire³⁴.

It may thus be concluded that in the late sixth century, the 'western' lands of Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and perhaps also Lydia, were more closely linked to Persia and the Persians, while the lands that had belonged to the Median empire were still more intimately connected with the Medes and their Scythian and Cimmerian predecessors. This alignment is made evident in 522 B.C., when the Median revolt against Darius, under Fravartish, is closely linked to uprisings in Armenia, Hyrcania, Parthia, Asagartia, and possibly among the 'Pointed-Cap Scythians', who lived east of the Caspian Sea (see note 28).

Thus, in the summer of 522 B.C., the Persian Achaemenid army returned to the Iranian Plateau, without their King, after spending three years in lands that had never before been conquered by Iranians. They returned via Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia, through lands without direct historical and administrative links with the Medes. And they returned to the heartland of the Empire now dominated by a man they would soon accuse, or had already started to do so, of being a Median *magus*.

9. *The vilified Bardiya*

So what exactly do we know about Bardiya, and what did the Persians say about their new King? Darius tells that the name of Cambyses' brother was Bardiya. This name, with various variants, is found in many Greek and other sources (see Dandamaev 1989:84, n. 3)³⁵. He was a full brother of Cambyses. Herodotus tells us that their mother was Cassandane, the daughter of Pharnaspes, an Achaemenid. They also had a sister, called Atossa.

³⁴ See also Diakonoff 1985:127-128, and Vogelsang 1992:110-112.

³⁵ The etymology of the name is often related to the Old Persian root *bard-*, 'be high' (cf. Kent 1953:200).

Ctesias however, uses the name of Tanyoxarkes to indicate Cambyses' brother (Ctesias, *apud* Photius, paragraph 8), and Xenophon calls him Tanaoxares (*Cyropaedia* VIII 7.11). Ctesias informs us that Cambyses and Tanyoxarkes were the sons of Cyrus and Amytis, the daughter of the Median king, Astyages. He also communicates that Tanyoxarkes was appointed by Cyrus as the governor of the Bactrians, Choramnians (Chorasmians), Parthians, and Carmanians. He was thus, according to Ctesias, a powerful figure in at least the eastern and northeastern marches of the Empire. Xenophon informs us that Tanaoxares was appointed satrap of Media, Armenia, and the Cadusians (*Cyropaedia* VIII 7.11). If either Ctesias or Xenophon transmitted a tradition based on the real situation (which of course is far from certain), then it could be concluded that Bardiya, the brother of Cambyses, occupied an important post on the Iranian Plateau, in lands dominated by the Median/Scythic class of rulers (see Vogelsang 1992).

According to Darius, Bardiya was secretly killed on the orders of Cambyses before the latter left for Egypt, in 526-525 B.C. Darius does not say whom he left behind in Persis as his representative³⁶. He does say however, that by early 522 B.C. there was a revolt in Persis that was led by a *magus* called Gaumāta, who told the people that he was Bardiya, Cambyses' brother. Darius adds that the impostor was crowned King on July 1, 522 B.C. In the Akkadian version of the Behistun text it is explicitly stated that Gaumāta was a Mede. The Median background of Cambyses' successor is indicated, not only by Herodotus (see above) and the Akkadian version of the DB text, but also by Plato (*Laws* III 694), who tells that Cambyses lost his throne to the Medes, led by a eunuch who despised Cambyses' stupidity. Whatever the case, it is clear that King Bardiya was not only denied his true ancestry, but was also accused of being a *magus* and a Mede. Darius' story would also suggest that Bardiya was left behind in Persis when Cambyses marched to Egypt; how else would he, or his impostor, so easily have occupied the Persian throne?

Herodotus roughly tells the same story as that found in the Behistun text, but he adds certain details which are of relevance. He says that Smerdis (his variant reading of the name of Bardiya) was killed by a man called Prexaspes while Cambyses was in Egypt. The murder was known

³⁶ It should be noted that, according to Herodotus, Xerxes, when he left Persis to campaign against the Greeks, left his uncle, Artabanus, behind to guard his position (*Hist.* VII 53).

only to a few people, including the governor of the palace, the *magus* Patizeithes³⁷. This man persuaded his brother, also called Smerdis and looking strikingly similar to the murdered prince, into taking Smerdis' place. Darius and his conspirators later killed both Patizeithes and his brother, Smerdis, in the royal palace at Susa. They did so to prevent the power of the Persians to slip back into the hands of the Medes, as expressly stated by Herodotus (*Hist.* III 65). Herodotus' sources thus agree with Darius' story, namely that Bardiya was in fact a Median *magus*. They would also corroborate the above suggestion that Bardiya had been Cambyses' viceroy in Persis; in Herodotus' story Bardiya's role seems to have been partly taken by Patizeithes, the brother of Smerdis.

Summarizing, the sources agree on the fact that the Persians accused their King of having taken the place of Cyrus' son, Bardiya, and of being, in reality, a *magus*. Reading the word *magus* in this context leads to the question whether it was merely used to further identify Gaumāta, or whether an accusation of being a *magus* was by itself already a damnation, at least among the Persians.

Herodotus tells us that following the murder of Smerdis, the Persians killed all the magoi they could find. The Greek historian adds that this occasion was commemorated in the yearly 'Magophonia' festival, on which day all the magoi were forced to remain at home. The same story is told by Ctesias (*apud* König, 8)³⁸. Herodotus and Ctesias therefore are unanimous (a rare occurrence) in their emphasis on the ethnic background of the usurper and on the collective blame for Smerdis' crimes put by the Persians on all of the magoi. The magoi thus constituted a distinct group within Persian society, and moreover, a group that could be blamed for all sorts of disasters. Consequently, the accusation of the leading Persians that Bardiya was an impersonator was made even more potent by their suggestion that the usurper was a *magus*. But why did the magoi have such a bad reputation? The answer is simple: they were different from the Persians. Darius in his Behistun text, and Herodotus in his *Historiae*, make it clear that the magoi were Medes, or at least were regarded to be so. In fact, depictions of priests in reliefs and elsewhere show persons, no doubt magoi,

³⁷ According to Markwart (1896:213ff.), the name of Patizeithes in fact means "superintendent of the royal house" (see also Wiesehöfer 1978:49-50).

³⁸ Discussions about the Magophonia are numerous. I only want to refer to Boyce 1982:86-88.

in Median/Scythic costume, holding the sacred *barsom* bundle of twigs, and tending the fire. They are dressed in a manner which is very different from the Persians. The magoi were thus outsiders in Persian society, firstly because they were closely linked to the Medes who lived far to the north-west and were the former masters of the Persians, and secondly, because of their learning and profession. The magoi occupied a special, and no doubt important position in Persian society, and especially in administration (compare Boyce 1982:84-85). Thus, Gaumāta was accused of being a *magus*, which meant that he was thought to belong to the “Median Fifth Column” living among the Persians and occupying a high place in government, and in the position for one of them to take the place of Cyrus’ son without anyone noticing it.

10. North versus South

So far I have tried to point out that ancient sources tend to put Darius’ ascent of the Persian throne against the background of the strife between the Persians and Medes, and that the Median magoi were accused of being involved in an attempt to deprive the Persians of their supremacy. We now also have reason to believe that the events in the years 522-521 B.C. can be divided into two successive stages, firstly the uprisings against King Bardiya (Babylonians; Elamites; Persians; Margians; and Darius’ successful palace coup), and secondly those directed against Darius (mainly in the lands of the former Median empire). The latter point would again strengthen the above hypothesis, also supported by Herodotus, that the Persians were about to lose their empire to their old adversaries, the Medes. Yet, as pointed out earlier, a direct opposition between Persians and Medes seems contradicted by various pieces of information, including the obvious support given to Darius by Median generals and troops (Vogelsang 1992:124-125), and the all too obvious fact that Darius did not enjoy the full support of all of the Persians, but at the same time did enjoy the support of some Medes.

The conclusion can be drawn that the situation was far more complex than a simple opposition between Persians and Medes³⁹. If the two peoples,

³⁹ A good example of how ethnic lines are broken through in a long civil war is demonstrated by the modern war in Afghanistan, in which Hazaras, Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Uzbeks can no longer be clearly defined as separate fighting groups, if that was ever the case.

in broad ethnic terms, could at all be differentiated in connection with the events of 522-521 B.C., there is likely to have been another dividing line, distinct from that of direct tribal descent. If such a dividing line can be identified, it should explain the apparent Persian-Median opposition in many of the accounts, and at the same time shed light on the question why there was such an overlap.

To explain the background to the momentous years of Darius' rise to power I have to go back to the centuries preceding the establishment of the Persian empire. During the first half of the first millennium B.C., as briefly referred to above, the Iranian Plateau was penetrated by a group of people who were of Iranian stock, similar to the Medes and Persians who arrived before them, and who derived ultimately from the steppes of Central Asia (Vogelsang 1992:89-93). These were the nomad horsemen that the Greeks came to recognize as the Scythians and Cimmerians, and whom the Persians used to call the Sakas (Herodotus, *Hist.* VII 64). In the Near East these horsemen are first reported in the late eighth century B.C. when they attacked the kingdom of Urartu, apparently from the (south)east (Salvini 1995: 87); in the seventh century they are listed in Assyrian and Babylonian sources as residing in the western part of the Iranian Plateau, including Media. In fact, it is evident from various sources that the Cimmerians and Scythians exercised a profound influence upon the autochthonous peoples living in a long belt of lands, stretching from the east and northeast of the Iranian world (Choresmia, Sogdia, Bactria, Margiana, Parthia, Hyrcania) to lands further west (Media, Armenia, Cappadocia). This influence is borne out by the characteristic costume and weaponry of all of these peoples as described and depicted in Classical and Persian sources and depictions. The Scythians/Sakas from the steppe belt of South Russia and Central Asia are all marked by their trousers, tunic, boots, bashlyq, short sword (*akinakes*), composite bow, bow-case (*gorytos*), etc.. In Greek and Persian depictions they are also all shown with long, uncurled hair. Most of these features are characteristic for the (upper class) delegates from Choresmia, Sogdia, Bactria, Parthia, Media, Armenia, and Cappadocia, who are depicted in the famous Achaemenid reliefs at Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam (fifth century B.C.). I have discussed this point in detail elsewhere (Vogelsang 1992), and there is no need to repeat my findings. What is important in the present context is the realization that during much of the first millennium B.C. there existed on the Iranian Plateau an opposition between the Scythianized North and the non-Scythianized South.

This opposition is reflected, among other places, in the history of the Medes and Persians. The Medes, as explained above, became almost indistinguishable from the Scythians and in fact built their empire upon the Scythian conquests of the preceding century. The Persians, living far to the south of the main east-west thrust of Scythian advance, for long resisted, consciously or not, the northern pressure and retained many of their original characteristics, especially in dress and weaponry (long flowing robes [no trousers!], long bows, daggers, shoes, large shields etc.). Yet the pressure was there, especially in the years that the Persians were dominated by the Medes, from the end of the seventh to the mid-sixth century B.C. Herodotus indicates a close relationship between the Median royal house and the Persian rulers; he tells how Cyrus himself was the son of the Median king's daughter, who was married off to a Persian princeling. Did Cyrus' father adopt Median customs? Did he wear trousers or skirts? Classical sources indicate how the Persians learnt many things from the Medes, including horse-riding, shooting with the short composite-bow, and wearing trousers and the other 'Scythic' items of dress⁴⁰. This process of Scythianization may have progressed unobtrusively for many years, yet at the same time it is clear from the Persian inscriptions and reliefs dating to the time of Darius and his successors that the Persian leaders were very much aware of their own, distinctive Persian background; they were proud of wearing the Persian/Elamite garb and they depicted themselves wearing the long flowing garments and being armed with the long bow, the dagger, the large shield, and the spear. In other words, while the Medes were for the greater part Scythianized, most of the Persians were strongly aware of being different, of being Persian. Yet the Persians spoke an Old Iranian language which was not very different from the language of the Medes and that of the Scythians and other Iranian peoples on the Plateau and beyond. They all belonged to the Iranian world and they shared many cultural characteristics. Medes, Scythians, and Persians could understand each other and work together.

This is the background of much of what happened in Irān in the late first half of the first millennium B.C. The Scythian conquests of the northern

⁴⁰ Compare e.g. Herodotus who tells us that the Persians adopted the Median costume for horseriding (*Hist.* I 135). See also the depictions at Persepolis of some Persian noblemen in full Persian/Elamite garb, but with the (Scythian) *gorytos* for the Scythian composite bow.

lands of Irān and adjoining districts in modern Turkey led to the establishment of the Median empire which also included parts of South Irān, including Persia. The Persians however, retained many of their local characteristics. When in turn they defeated the Medes and many other peoples, after years of domination by their Scythianized northwestern neighbours, they came to emphasize their own, Persian characteristics, which to them may well have marked their independence from, and even their superiority over the Medes. And was their superiority not shown by their conquest of Babylonia, Lydia and Egypt?

Thus, next to an ethnic differentiation between Medes and Persians, there was also a differentiation between those who had adopted Scythian customs and those who so far had remained relatively unaffected. It is evident that a clear dividing line between Medes and Persians as ethnic groups is difficult to draw; it is even more difficult to differentiate clearly the 'Scythianized' and 'non-Scythianized' Medes and Persians. Not every Mede was Scythianized, and not every Persian was 'non-Scythianized'⁴¹. I can refer to the Asagartans of Eastern Irān. In the struggles with Darius, the Asagartan leader claimed descent from the Median kings (see above); yet the Asagartan equipment was different from that of the Median and Scythic groups, since part of their equipment, according to Herodotus (*Hist.* VII 61ff.), was 'Pactyan'. The Pactyan equipment was also worn, according to Herodotus, by the Caspians (from Capisa, north of Kābul), the Utians (from Carmania), the Mykoi (from Makrān along the Arabian Sea far to the south), the Parikanioi (from south Afghānistān), and the Pactyans themselves (possible living in East Afghānistān), thus by peoples who lived to the south of the Iranian deserts, and south of the Scythianized belt of lands to the north (Vogelsang 1992:198-200).

In this respect the background of Bardiya may be of importance. Both Ctesias and Xenophon indicate that upon Cyrus' death he became the governor of a segment of the Empire that totally, or at least for the greater part, formed part of the Scythianized North. Being the son of Cyrus, who

⁴¹ Prexaspes may well have been a 'Scythianized' Persian. He was the man who, according to Herodotus, assassinated Smerdis on the orders of Cambyses, and who later denied all knowledge of Smerdis' death, but at the crucial moment told the Persians that the King (Smerdis) was an impostor. He may have been the father of Aspathines (*Aspahanah*-), Darius' bow-bearer (compare Hinz 1971:270 and 1973:59; Gschnitzer 1977:20), who is depicted at Naqsh-e Rostām in Median garb.

himself was a descendant of the Median king Astyages (according to Herodotus and other Classical sources), Bardiya may well have become the exponent of Median/Scythic influence upon the Persians, perhaps as a reaction to a more prominent 'Persian' attitude of his brother, Cambyses. Consequently the majority of the Persian leaders, proud of their own culture and their conquests far beyond the boundaries of the former Median empire, felt that such a man on Cyrus' throne could impossibly be regarded as a true Persian⁴².

Seen in the above light, the struggles of 522-521 B.C. can be put in the context of the opposition between North and South, between the Scythianized North and the non-Scythianized South.

11. The East of the Empire

The North-South division on the Iranian Plateau during much of the first millennium B.C. was particularly noticeable in the East of the Empire. The northern lands were thoroughly Scythianized (including Choresmia and Sogdia in the extreme north, but also Parthia and Bactria further to the south), while the more southern lands remained relatively untouched by northern influences (Areia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Carmania). The transition was noticeable in the Margiana-Herāt-Seistān corridor to the west of the Central Afghan Mountains, and in the Paropamisadae and Gandhāra, to the east of the Afghan mountains. For various reasons, as discussed above, I include Persia in the non-Scythianized belt of South Iranian lands. There was thus a long stretch of lands, extending from the borders of Elam in the west, across Persia and Carmania towards South-eastern Irān, where people retained many of their original characteristics (this is the 'Pactyan' belt of Herodotus, Vogelsang 1992:198-200). To illustrate this point I can refer to Classical writers who refer to the similarities between the Persians on the one hand, and the Carmanians and Drangians on the other⁴³. It is exactly this belt of lands that in 522-521 B.C. was con-

⁴² Median/Scythic costume included the bashlyq, which was a piece of headgear that could also cover the ears and chin. It is merely speculative, but Herodotus' story that the false Smerdis had no ears might indicate the difference between Persian/Elamite dress and the costume of the Medes and Scythians (see also Demandt 1972 and Gschnitzer 1977:15).

⁴³ See also the turban worn by Persian servants at Persepolis, and by representatives from Areia and Drangiana (Vogelsang 1992:143-145).

trolled, in some form or other, by Vahyazdāta, the man who called himself the son of Cyrus⁴⁴.

Troops despatched by Vahyazdāta fought in December 522 B.C. against Vivāna, whom Darius called his servant, at Kāpishākānīsh, north of modern Kābul, at the southern entrance to the main passes leading across the Hindu Kush to Bactria. The question is whether Vahyazdāta's troops were about to march even further, in order to invade Bactria (having previously driven Vivāna out of Arachosia up north to the Kābul valley), or whether Vahyazdāta's army was being attacked by troops that had crossed over from Bactria. The first possibility seems unlikely, if only because the ensuing two battles indicate that the scene of battle moved southward. Vivāna drove Vahyazdāta's troops towards Arachosia and hence back to Persis. Throughout history, the Kābul valley has been the first stage in any invasion plan from the north, from across the mountains⁴⁵. The tentative conclusion may thus be drawn that Vahyazdāta's troops actually defended the lands of Arachosia against an attack led by Vivāna from the (Bactrian) north. This also implies that Darius' statement to the extent that Vivāna was his satrap in Arachosia (DB III, paragraph 45) is correct in so far that eventually Vivāna became (again) satrap after defeating Vahyazdāta's troops.

Vivāna's actions in South Afghānistān have their counterpart in the activities, at the same time, of another general from Bactria, namely Dādarshish, who quelled the Margian insurrection on December 10, 522 B.C.⁴⁶. Thus, by December 522 B.C., two Bactrian generals had left their basis, one, named Dādarshish, going west towards Margiana, the other, Vivāna, going southeast towards the Kābul valley and hence south towards Arachosia. Dādarshish was fighting a rebellion in the oasis of Margiana. This uprising had probably started in the time that King Bardiya was still in power (see above), and was led by a man called Frāda, who in the Behistun relief

⁴⁴ See also Hoffmann 1979:92, who suggested that religious motives led Vahyazdāta to dispatch troops to Arachosia.

⁴⁵ A noticeable exception being, of course, the campaign of Alexander the Great against Bessus, the Bactrian satrap. Yet Alexander returned to the Kābul valley after pacifying the north, and before setting off for the Indian plains.

⁴⁶ I assume that Dādarshish resided at that time in Bactra, which of course is not necessarily the case. However, Vivāna's campaign in Arachosia clearly started in Bactria, and I therefore think that Bactra played a pivotal role in the quashing of the 'revolts' in Margiana to the west and Arachosia (and Sattagydia) to the south.

is wearing mainly Persian/Elamite clothes. Vivāna moved south to fight troops supported by men sent out by the Persian rebel leader Vahyazdāta, who had started his uprising when King Bardiya was still alive, or so we assume. All this information would put Dādarshish and Vivāna, at least initially, in the camp of King Bardiya and his Median/Scythic following.

However, Darius calls both men Persians, his servants, and he tells us that they were satraps in Bactria and Arachosia respectively. Whether or not both men were truly Persians is a question which we cannot answer, although it should be noted that another general of Darius, also called Dādarshish, is called an Armenian, and therefore likely to be of Median/Scythic stock (DB II, paragraphs 26-28)⁴⁷. The reference that both men were Persians may therefore have been based on other considerations than purely ethnic⁴⁸.

Whatever the case, Darius claims that Dādarshish and Vivāna acted on his behalf. This means, if correct, that Darius must have given them orders before both men set off for Margiana (battle fought on December 10, 522 B.C.), and the Kābul valley (battle fought on December 29, 522 B.C.) respectively. Considering the distances and natural obstacles (deserts, mountains) involved, plus the fact that it seems unlikely that the two men would immediately have obeyed Darius following the murder of Bardiya on September 29, without showing some hesitation, there again rises the suspicion that the time schedule as presented by Darius is too tight. The only possibility left is that Dādarshish and Vivāna acted on their own accord, or upon instructions of King Bardiya, and only at a later date sided with Darius. In this way the fighting in Eastern Irān in 522-521 B.C. takes another dimension. Instead of a series of battles fought between the supporters of Darius and 'rebel' troops, we now see two generals in Bactria, throughout history the most important Eastern province, being engaged in the suppression and massacre of the Margian rebels against King Bardiya, who were led by a man dressed in Persian/Elamite costume, and against the lands south of the Hindu Kush watershed, a region dominated by Persians and their supporters under orders of the Persian 'rebel' Vahyazdāta. In other words, Dādarshish and Vivāna together constituted a formidable block that crushed the revolts against central authority that had broken out

⁴⁷ It is even possible that both men were identical (cf. König 1938).

⁴⁸ See also Briant 1984:91, who casts doubt on the true origin of Dādarshish and Vivāna.

in Margiana and in South and Southeast Afghānistān (Arachosia). Thus, perhaps inadvertently, they weakened the position of Darius' foes in Media (Fravartish) and Persia (Vahyazdāta). This would explain why both men are given so much prominence in the Behistun text: they are the only functionaries who are called "satrap". They are called satrap although we suspect that at least one of them, Vivāna, first had to drive off Vahyazdāta's forces before he could take up his new position. They are also called "my slave" and "Persian". Above I already expressed some doubts whether the adjective "Persian" does actually indicate the origin of the person, or whether it was, in these and comparable cases, an honorific. In view of what I said earlier it seems most likely that both men were not Persian by birth. All the above titles were probably given to them by Darius for obvious political reasons. We may assume that the two men were removed from office as soon as Darius had the political and military strength to do so; in fact, they are never again heard of in Achaemenid or Greek sources⁴⁹.

12. *A dynastic split*

Seen in the above light it is evident that the events of 522-521 B.C. did not merely result from a simple political conflict within the ruling family. Neither was it an ethnic clash between a ruling nation and its erstwhile masters. The underlying conflict was that between the autochthonous Iranian population of the south of the Iranian Plateau, and the Scythians and Scythianized Iranians, predominantly Medes, from the north of the Plateau. For a long time, since at least the end of the eighth century B.C., the Scythians had been the dominant cultural group on the Plateau, extending their influence, and that of their Scythianized subjects such as the Medes, to the west towards Anatolia, to the southwest as far as the gates of Egypt (if we may believe Herodotus, *Hist.* I 105), and to the south as far as Persis along the eastern borders of Elam. In the middle of the sixth century B.C. the Persians overcame their Scythianized, Median overlords, and in their turn set off to conquer one by one the proud empires that so far had retained their independence of the Scythians and Medes: Lydia, Babylonia, Egypt. Yet the Persians could not possibly control their Empire without the

⁴⁹ Unless Dādarshish of Bactria is identical with the Dādarshish of Armenia (see above). But also in that case, it was the last we hear of him.

help of their equally Iranian, but Scythianized subjects from the north. Cyrus could still placate both groups; he was both a Median and a Persian prince⁵⁰. With Cambyses however, the emphasis shifted to the Persians. He was the son of a Persian mother, and grew up in a time that the Persians marched far beyond the old borders of the Median empire. Cambyses for some time was governor of Babylonia (cf. Dandamaev 1989:56ff.)⁵¹, and the greater part of his short reign was spent on organizing and executing the conquest of Egypt. It seems to have been Cambyses' brother Bardiya who spent much of his career in the Scythianized Iranian lands of the north, and who in the absence of Cambyses became the viceroy in Irān with his headquarters in Persis. With Cambyses and many of the leading Persians far away in Egypt, for such a long period (almost three years in total), Scythian cultural influence upon the Persian court of Bardiya is likely to have exerted itself in such a way as to create a strong and dangerous opposition within Persian society between the supporters of Bardiya and those who opposed him. In this way the uprising of Vahyazdāta against Bardiya should be seen as the outcome of the process that had started long before, but which was brought to a climax when the dissatisfied generals and ranks of Cambyses' army had returned to the Plateau. Vahyazdāta's claim that King Bardiya was an impostor is mirrored in Darius' story of the *magus* Gaumāta. In September 522 B.C., or even earlier, Vahyazdāta rose in rebellion against the King, telling his followers somewhere in eastern Persis that he was the real Bardiya. By the end of that same month, Darius and his conspirators killed King Bardiya in Media, claiming that the King had been an impersonator and that the real Bardiya had been killed long before. At the same time revolts against King Bardiya had broken out in Elam, south of Media; in Mesopotamia, and in Margiana.

13. *Darius between North and South*

No historian will deny the political acumen of Darius. In whatever devious way he succeeded in becoming the undisputed King of the Achaemenid

⁵⁰ Arrian (*Anab. Alex.* VI 29.6) refers to the Median trousers placed in the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae.

⁵¹ It is in this context interesting to read in the Babylonian Chronicle (Oppenheim 1974:3500) that Cambyses upset the priests of Babylon by entering into the presence of Nabu, not wearing the customary linen cloak and turban, but an Elamite (Persian) dress.

Empire, he was the man who moulded the Empire and gave it a structure that would withstand internal and external threats for almost two centuries, until the military genius of a young man from Macedonia brought the Empire to its knees. However, Darius not only restructured the political and fiscal organization of the Empire, he also set models in art and architecture that would be copied for centuries. One of these models is the alteration that is found in Persepolis between men wearing the Persian/Elamite dress, and those in the Median/Scythic riding costume. This point is clearly seen in the various reliefs of delegates from all parts of the Empire that come to the Persepolis palaces to offer their gifts to the King. Each delegation is led by a palace courtier, alternately dressed in Persian/Elamite, and Median/Scythic dress. There is also the famous procession of courtiers along the facades of the Apadana stairway; again there is the change in dress. The alteration is a clear indication that Darius intended to show that those wearing the Median/Scythic costume, although not equal to those who wore, like Darius himself, the Persian/Elamite dress, were still held in the highest esteem. Bearing in mind the political prowess of Darius, this feature can hardly be separated from the processes sketched above that dominated much of what happened in the years 522-521 B.C. Darius had realized that the opposition on the Iranian Plateau, the heartland of the Empire, between the Scythianized North and the non-Scythianized South, had to be neutralized in order to guarantee the continuation of the Empire.

On the one hand he had to convince his own Persians, from the South, that they remained the main political power in the Empire. Their clan of the Achaemenids provided the royal family; and the new palace and city of Persepolis, in the centre of Persis, was to become the ritual capital of the Empire. At that place the delegates from the subject nations each year presented their gifts to the King, and at that same place, or nearby at Naqsh-e Rostām, the Kings found their last resting place.

On the other hand Darius had to placate the Medes and other Scythianized Iranians, convincing them of their high standing within the Empire. Their importance was indicated in the reliefs of the official monuments of the Empire (see above). Ecbatana, the Median capital, remained the residence of the Achaemenid kings during the summer months, together with Persepolis, Susa and Babylon. Darius continued to appoint high-ranking Medes at high places within the organization of the Empire, as he had done during the internecine strifes of 522-

521 B.C.⁵². But foremost, Medes and other Scythianized Iranians occupied a place of honour and importance within the ranks of the Achaemenid army; at Marathon, in 490 B.C., they and the Persians withstood the Athenian attack and pushed the Greeks back from the sea (Herodotus, *Hist.* VI 113), and at Salamis all the Achaemenid ships were manned, among others, by trusted soldiers, either Persian, Mede or Scythian (*idem* VII 184).

The gap between North and South, which in 522 B.C. had opened to a dangerous chasm, thereby threatening the continuation of the Empire, was slowly bridged by Darius in the years to follow. Solving this problem may be regarded as one of his major achievements.

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⁵² Compare the role of Datis, a Mede, who was one of the commanders of the Achaemenid army sent against Eretria and Athens (Herodotus, *Hist.* VI 94).

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